

## Fox Special Report with Brit Hume: Interview with Richard Miniter (Transcript # 100402cb.254)

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With Brit Hume

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

**KERRY:** I will hunt down and kill the terrorists wherever they are. But we also have to be smart, Jim. And smart means not diverting your attention from the real war on terror in Afghanistan against Usama bin Laden, and taking it off to Iraq. Where the 9/11 Commission confirms there was no connection to 9/11 itself and Saddam Hussein, and where the reason for going to war was weapons of mass destruction, not the removal of Saddam Hussein.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

**HUME:** It does seem a fair question. Did the president and his administration take their eye off -- their eye off of the ball in the war on terror? Which raises the further question of whether the U.S. and its allies are now winning the war on terror?

For answer, we turn to a man who just published a book on that very subject. He's investigative reporter Richard Miniter. And his book is called "Shadow War" and it follows a previous book is "Losing bin Laden," both of them on this general subject.

The subtitle, "How Bush is Winning the War on Terror," suggests the answer to this question. But if the president and his team are winning, what would you cite as the evidence of that?

**RICHARD MINITER, AUTHOR, "SHADOW WAR":** Well, I would look at the more than two-thirds of the al Qaeda leadership that has been killed and captured. And also...

**HUME:** They're saying three-quarters in the administration? Is that an exaggeration? Or does anybody really know?

**MINITER:** I think people have different ways of counting this stuff. But we do know a number of major al Qaeda figures have been killed or captured. The ones that have been captured are talking. One of the ones that are talking -- and this has gotten very little media attention. I think the media -- everyone talks about intelligence failures. Well, let's talk about media failures. I think the media has been missing some of the biggest stories in the war on terror. And as a result, the war on terror looks a lot worse than it actually is.

The president is getting direct information. So he sees one thing. Joe Public is reading "The New York Times," and watching CBS News and Fox News, and coming to a different conclusion. They are just things that are just not getting reported. One example, the al Qaeda admiral, his name is Abd Rahim al Nashiri. He commanded a fleet of up to 15 cargo ships that were used to transport bombs or terrorists. We captured him in a place called Um Qasr, one of the United Emirates last year. He's now talking.

And we dismantled an entire operation to make attacks on the United States and Americans abroad by sea. We defeated attempts to blow up warships in the Straits of Gibraltar. We defeated attempts to blow up oil tankers in the Straits of Malacca, and so on. And that's just one set of attacks that we've prevented.

The big picture of this war, which has been missing is after Tora Bora in December of 2001, al Qaeda badly need...

**HUME:** Let me ask you a couple of questions about Tora Bora.

**MINITER:** Sure.

**HUME:** It has been suggested that -- Senator Kerry has in fact charged that the job of moving in and capturing Usama bin Laden, when we had that crack at him there in Tora Bora, had been -- was basically farmed out to locals who were not even united with each other. Is that a fair charge?

**MINITER:** Well, we did farm it out to locals. And when you can debate that, whether or not it made sense to do that. But remember, we're not talking about the OK Corral here. This is a very treacherous terrain, very steep. Some of these hills are so high that helicopters cannot fly up to that height. They don't -- they technically can't go above the ceiling.

**HUME:** What? For what reason? Because the air is too thin or what?

**MINITER:** The air is too thin and high winds make helicopter travel impossible in that time of the year. Also, you know, it's not something where you can drive an armored personnel carrier up these some of these hills. So you've got to deploy troops in a very difficult environment. You can have a battle going on and 100 meters over in another valley, you'll hear nothing and see nothing. It's an impossible area to seal off.

I've talked to officers who say that they could have put two divisions of troops in there and the landscape would have swallowed them up. It's just -- it was -- it's an impossible -- Kerry could have put the entire United States military in there. It wouldn't have made a difference.

**HUME:** Well, let me just -- that leads to another question. So he got away at Tora Bora. We don't, I guess now, know where he is? Is that right?

**MINITER:** There's no reliable intelligence as to where he is. I do have in my book an astonishing account by two Iranian intelligence operatives who say that in November of 2003, they saw him eyeball to eyeball inside Iran. That doesn't mean he's Iran now, but November 2003...

**HUME:** Yes. Other people have suggested that as well that he has been in and out of Iran. And that may continue to be true.

**MINITER:** Well, that opens a frightening question. Is or has al Qaeda or bin Laden formed an alliance with the mullahs of Iran. And given that the Iranians are working on a bomb and they have an alliance with al Qaeda. That leads to a nightmare scenario.

**HUME:** It certainly does. Which suggests that -- would tend to buttress Senator Kerry's case, would it not, that Iran is developing a bomb while we've been preoccupied in Iraq?

**MINITER:** Well, I don't think the United States is entirely asleep at the switch. I mean there

have been things done to try and influence the Iranians. But the Iranians are also actively fighting us in Iraq and in Afghanistan. Remember that 70 percent of the attacks on U.S. and Allied Forces are paid for. And some of that money is coming from the Iranian Intelligence Agency.

**HUME:** The question then has been raised about number of troops. We had to put -- we put 130,000 or more in Iraq. We have, what? How many searching for Usama bin Laden?

**MINITER:** Well, searching for or deployed in Afghanistan, I think we have about 20,000.

**HUME:** And there's also special units that are involved in this search, correct?

**MINITER:** That's correct. But look...

**HUME:** Now, the question has been raised as to whether that's sufficient? Whether, indeed -- now, you talked about deployment or divisions in the mountains around Tora Bora, indicating that wouldn't have helped. But what about in this overall quest to locate him and to find him in the border areas there between Pakistan and Afghanistan?

**MINITER:** This is an intelligence and Special Forces operation to get bin Laden. This is not a grunt infantry operation. The -- the units have particular skills. The Mountain Division, which is very effective in Afghanistan, would not be effective in Iraq. An Armored Division, which would be very effective in Iraq, would not be effective in Afghanistan. These are different trains, different environments, different cultures -- Brit.

**HUME:** And numbers of troops?

**MINITER:** I don't know. Troop numbers -- after a certain point, troop numbers just increase targets. I think Rumsfeld is right about that.

**HUME:** All right. So what else would you cite in this argument -- we've got about a minute left here, that would tell you that despite the fact, as you suggest, we could have a nightmare scenario developing between Iran and Usama bin Laden, that we are in fact winning this war.

**MINITER:** Well, let's look at the big picture. After Tora Bora, bin Laden's operations needed badly safe havens and trading camps. They have to replenish the troops they lost. They have to train new people and the security to plan new operations. They haven't been able to do that. They tried to set up operations up in Southeast Asia in 2002 and through U.S. efforts. Along with our allies in Southeast Asia, those operations have been disrupted.

They then moved to the Sahara. And a series of alliances newly developed by Bush and covert operations including shootouts, we've stopped al Qaeda from establishing bases in the Sahara. So we've kept these guys on the run for 3 1/2 years. That's why we haven't had an attack on our shores. It's not that we've been lucky. It's we've been pushing and fighting. The administration has a far better story to tell than they have told. And they're incapable of telling it. But that's a job for folks like us.

**HUME:** All right. Richard Miniter, glad to have you. Thanks for coming in.

**MINITER:** Thanks for having me on.

**HUME:** We have got to take a break here to bring you the rest of the headlines. When we come

back, what was that that John Kerry pulled from his pocket before Thursday night's debate? We have the answer next on the "Grapevine"

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

**HUME:** More SPECIAL REPORT in a moment. But first, let's get a check on the day's other headlines and a preview of tonight's "FOX REPORT" from Shepard Smith in our New York newsroom.

(NEWSBREAK)

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